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RHMFIUU/COMUSJAPAN YOKOTA AB JA PRIORITY  
INFO RUEHFK/AMCONSUL FUKUOKA 6851  
RUEHOK/AMCONSUL OSAKA KOBE 0108  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 2924  
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 1096  
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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION Q GSDF WITHDRAWAL FROM IRAQ  
- TOKYO

LEAD STORIES: Wednesday morning's business daily Nihon Keizai front-paged the GOJ's start of preparatory work to expand ASDF airlift operations in Iraq following its decision to withdraw GSDF troops from the southern Iraqi city of Samawah.

1. "GSDF Withdrawal Not an End to Japan's Assistance for Iraq" The top-circulation, moderate Yomiuri editorialized (6/21): "...Following the GOJ's decision Tuesday to withdraw GSDF noncombat troops engaged in humanitarian and reconstruction assistance from the southern Iraqi city of Samawah, JDA Director-General Nukaga issued a withdrawal order.... At present, troops from 28 countries, including the US, are deployed in Iraq to maintain security and provide humanitarian and reconstruction assistance. The activities of the GSDF confirmed the 'US-Japan alliance in the global context' and helped strengthen bilateral relations. With the launch of a permanent government in Iraq, there has been major progress in the political process there, and British and Australian troops will shortly hand over security duties in Samawah to the Iraqi authorities. The GOJ determined that the conditions were right for a withdrawal....

2. "Instability in Iraq would harm the stability not only of the Middle East but of the international community as a whole. Iraq's reconstruction is of critical importance to Japan, which is dependent on the Middle East for nearly 90 percent of its oil imports. At the request of UN Secretary General Annan, the GOJ has decided to continue and expand ASDF airlift operations in Iraq. If the security situation improves, the UN office there will become functional again, leading to an expansion of

Japan's role and responsibilities. Japan needs to increase its official development assistance (ODA) for Iraq.... It is imperative for the SDF to work for the peace and stability of the international community."

¶3. "GSDF Withdrawal: Hardly a Good Outcome" An editorial in the liberal Asahi commented (6/21): "...The mission of the first GSDF troops to be dispatched to a war zone, which began with a request from a senior USG official for 'boots on the ground,' is coming to an end after two-and-a-half years. The ASDF will continue airlift operations in Iraq.... The security situation in Iraq has not improved at all, with sectarian violence intensifying.... The GOJ insisted on deploying GSDF troops in Iraq to demonstrate its alliance with the US, which was the subject of withering international criticism....

¶4. "The ASDF, whose operations will be expanded to include Baghdad and northern Iraq, will continue to be exposed to danger. Following the GSDF withdrawal, the ASDF role in supporting the multinational forces will come to the fore. The ASDF should be withdrawn along with the GSDF. We cannot allow the SDF, which are increasingly being integrated into America's global military strategy, to be sent to the 'next Iraq,' and we are unable to feel relief over the GSDF withdrawal."

SCHIEFFER